

*News from the*

**U.S. Senate Committee on  
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions**

**Michael B. Enzi (Wyoming), Chairman**



**For Immediate Release  
Monday, May 8, 2006  
Contact: Craig Orfield (202) 224-6770**

***ENZI CRITICIZES PBS SEGMENT  
FOR FALLING WELL SHORT OF THE TRUTH ABOUT S. 1955***

**Washington, D.C.** – U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee today sent a letter to Michael Getler, Ombudsman of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), criticizing the egregious portrayal of the Enzi-Nelson Small Business Health Plan (SBHP) bill, S. 1955, during the segment “Payment Due” on the “NOW” series on Friday, May 5.

In the letter Enzi points out that the segment was an unfortunate departure from PBS’s editorial standards for two reasons: first, it completely fell short of the truth regarding S. 1955; second, it reported assertions by critics without verifying whether these assertions had any merit or basis in fact.

“I was deeply disappointed by PBS’s decision to air this program about such an important matter without first checking the basic facts,” Enzi said. “A five minute conversation with any attorney remotely familiar with insurance or employee-benefits law would have easily proven this assertion to be completely false. It’s a shame.”

The segment focused on the experiences of people who were misled by insurance companies as to the contents of their insurance policies, particularly the problems faced by Mrs. Dana Christensen and her husband.

“It is unfortunate that Mrs. Christiansen and her late husband were sold an insurance policy that did not deliver the benefits they thought they were promised,” Enzi said. “I have tremendous sympathy for her and for others in similar situations. However, her case has nothing to do with federal law, federal regulation, or the bill we have offered, S. 1955.”

The company that sold Mrs. Christiansen the policy was and continues to be licensed in the State of California. However, the policy would not even qualify as a SBHP under the Enzi-Nelson bill. By trying to draw a parallel between Mrs. Christiansen’s situation and S. 1955, PBS missed the real problem: California’s outdated, loophole-ridden health insurance regulations. The dollar amounts on minimum coverage standards have not been updated in three decades, allowing a few sinister companies, like the one that sold Mrs. Christiansen a policy, to exploit their purchasers.

“The PBS segment presented this story as though it were in some way a reason to be concerned about S. 1955, even though that is clearly and unequivocally false,” Enzi said. “California’s own regulations are the real culprit here. Our bill would, in fact, prevent incidents like this from occurring to individuals enrolled in SBHPs.”

Enzi’s second concern with the PBS segment was that it repeated the unfounded and self-serving criticisms of the bill’s opponents. PBS reported that “critics say” the bill would take away an individual’s right to sue under state common law if he or she is injured by the actions of an insurance company. This is simply not true.

The fact is, under S. 1955 states would continue to maintain regulatory control over all health insurance plans, including SBHPs. Individuals, likewise, would retain their right to sue a SBHP’s insurance company to the full extent permitted under state law.

“This bill is enormously popular among all Americans – 93 percent of Republicans and 86 percent of Democrats support it. Unfortunately, the groups that currently monopolize the industry are pulling out all the stops to prevent cost-lowering competition,” Enzi said. “That includes using scare tactics and fear to motivate people to oppose it. This is just another example of these groups spreading falsehoods to serve their own interests at the expense of the American worker.”

Enzi made it clear to Mr. Getler that he did not intend to call for an official review of the show or of PBS, which is federally funded. He did, however, want to inform him of these gross misrepresentations in case PBS elects to produce a more accurate follow-up segment.

###